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# Strategies Business Managers Use to Improve Employee Performance

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MS, Clark University, 2006

BS, Clark University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Poor employee performance is detrimental to an organization's success and may dictate a company's failure. Therefore, business managers are concerned with developing employee performance because poor employee performance may dictate a company's collapse. Grounded in Vroom's expectancy theory, the purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to identify strategies business managers use to improve employee performance. Participants included 3 central Massachusetts business managers who have used successful strategies to improve employee performance. Data were collected through semistructured face-to-face interviews and review of company documents. Yin's 5-step approach was used for data analysis, and 3 themes were identified: setting clear expectations and performance reviews, recognition and reward, and management style. A key recommendation is that managers should communicate clearly and provide feedback with clear expectations, coaching, and training to create successful working environments. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve employee performance. Improved employee performance can lead to improved overall organizational productivity. Improved employee productivity can enhance the prosperity of an organization's managers, its employees, their families, the surrounding communities, and the local economy.

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## Dedication

To God, for providing me with the knowledge, wisdom, and courage to move forward while I reached my goal and strengthened my faith throughout my doctoral study journey. To my wife, Massitan Fall; my children, Hawa M. Fall, Oumou M. Fall, Kadidia M. Fall, N'Dioba M. Fall; and my grandchildren, Abu Koromah and Kadidia Koromah.

I also dedicate this study to my late parents, Boubacar Fall and Ndioba Gueye, who taught me the importance of perseverance and that nothing was impossible as long as I had faith and humility. You continue to inspire me, even though you are not physically here to continuously give me hope and strength. I am always reminded to continue striving for my best and to achieve my goals in life when I recall the moments and the memories we shared. My children and my wife have been my biggest supporters throughout this long and difficult doctoral journey.

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I thank my loving wife for her continued support, motivation, and encouragement to move forward and never quit. Finally, I thank my children for inspiring me to achieve something great in life.

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# Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Managers and leaders who help employees to improve their performance build a strong organizational culture. Researchers have identified a clear link between managers and employee performance levels; however, some organizational leaders have spent an insufficient amount of time establishing goals and measurements for employee performance. According to Brajer-Marczak (2014), 13% of employees worldwide engaged in their work, 63% did not engage, and 24% actively disengaged.

## Background of the Problem

Employee performance strategies are key organizational concerns. Organizational leaders design strategies to improve employee performance and assist workers with achieving their strategic objectives (Demerouti, Bakker, & Leiter, 2014). To ensure success, managers must develop strategies to improve employee performance. Business managers must consider employee management with a strategic approach to achieve organizational goals (Bajwa, Yousaf, & Rizwan, 2014). Employee recruitment and retention require positive work environments in which employers recognize and reward employees for quality performance (Bakotic, 2014). To attract and retain talented employees, managers should develop strategies, including financial and nonfinancial reward systems (Demerouti et al., 2014).

## Problem Statement

A lack of employee improvement strategies indicates lower organizational profits (Ugoani, 2016). Human resources (HR) analysts spend, on average $164 billion a year to improve employee performance (Abaci & Pershing, 2017). The general business problem is that organizational managers lack employee improvement strategies, which can result in a loss of profit. The specific business problem is that some managers lack strategies to improve employee performance in the workplace

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how business managers improve employee performance. The target population consisted of three Central Massachusetts business managers who had implemented successful employee improvement strategies. Scholars and managers could use the study's results for positive social change by devising and implementing new strategies to improve business practices, workplace performance, and economic growth. The findings may also add to the working knowledge of flexible workplaces.

## Nature of the Study

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study to explore participants' experiences in the semiconductor field. The qualitative approach allows researchers to uncover the context of problems experienced in daily life (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). Quantitative methods were not appropriate because there were no theories or hypotheses being numerically tested in this study. In quantitative methodology, researches use numerical measurements and statistical analysis and do not include instrument-based questions (Larch, 2014). Scholars use mixed methods to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative approaches to broaden their understanding. As it includes quantitative analysis, a mixed-methods approach was not suitable for this study because the purpose was to present the successful strategies semiconductor managers use to improve employee performance.

In case studies, researchers describe events by focusing on time and context (Abma & Stakes, 2014). Scholars use case studies to study and understand real-world events and practices (Yin, 2014). Accordingly, the single-case study design was appropriate for this study. Phenomenological or ethnographic designs were not suitable for the study. Researchers use phenomenology to explore the meaning and essence of participants' lived experiences (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014); exploring, uncovering, and making sense of the experiences of participants who improved employee performance was not this study's focus. Ethnography was not suitable for this study because there were no culturally important events explored. In addition, an ethnographic study requires researchers to spend a substantial amount of time in participants' cultural settings to describe the cultural phenomena (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014), which was not a component of this research. Accordingly, a case study was the most appropriate design for exploring employee improvement strategies in a natural setting.

## Research Question

The central research question for this study was:

How do business managers improve employee performance?

## Interview Questions

Participants took part in semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, as follows:

1. What strategies are most effective for improving employee performance?

2. How do you assess the effectiveness of your employee improvement strategies?
3. How do you motivate employees to perform?
4. How do you reward employees for their performance?
5. What barriers do you think hinder employee performance in your organization?
6. How have you overcome these obstacles?
7. What other information would you like to add regarding strategies you use to improve employee performance?

## Conceptual Framework

Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory served as the study's conceptual framework as a potential means for understanding the successful employee improvement strategies that managers use. In expectancy theory, Vroom suggested that individual motivational factors indicate employee performance levels, employee motivational factors indicate improved performance, and improved performance indicates outcomes with associated values. According to expectancy theory, employees consciously choose a particular course of action based on their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes to enhance their performances and achieve results that are important to them (Chen, Ellis, & Suresh, 2016; Ghoddousi, Bahrami, Chileshe, & Hosseini, 2014). Employees may be motivated to achieve their individual goals if they trust that a positive correlation exists between effort and performance. If employees observe that certain results indicate desirable rewards and feel the reward satisfies an important need, then they consider the work required to satisfy the need worthwhile. Expectancy theory comprises three components: (a) the employee's expectation that working hard results in the desired performance level, (b) the employee's expectation that working hard will provide rewards, and (c) the employee's perception that the outcome of hard work is worth the effort or value associated with the work.

## Operational Definitions

*Employee development plan:* A process (tool) managers use to align every employee to the organization's objectives and business goals (Wise & Jayne, 2014)

*Employee performance:* Employees' work-related outcomes and achievements equal their performance (Anitha, 2014).

*Job satisfaction*: Employees' general perceptions about their jobs or their compilation of attitudes toward various job aspects contribute to their happiness at work (Bakotic, 2014).

*Workplace performance:* Employees' actions and behaviors at their job sites equate to their performance at work (Bakker, Demerouti, & Lieke, 2012)

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions are factors considered to be true, real, or certain without proof or demonstration (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The study contains three assumptions. The first assumption was that all participants responded openly, without bias, and truthfully to the interview questions. The second assumption was that the participants shared their successful improvement processes and procedures. The third assumption was that purposive sampling was an acceptable and effective method of selecting participants to interview.

Limitations are factors beyond a researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The primary limitation of this study is that the results are not generalizable. The second limitation is that the sample size might not have provided a clear population distribution for useful results. Lastly, because I was the sole data collector and interpreter, there was potential for individual bias, but the data analysis techniques and data collection methods reduced the likelihood and effects of researcher bias.

Delimitations are the boundaries of a study within the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation was that only Central Massachusetts business managers were eligible to participate in the study. The second delimitation was that only business managers who successfully use employee improvement strategies could participate.

## Significance of the Study

### Contribution to Business Practice

Employee motivation levels significantly predict employee performance levels (Elqadri, Priyono, Suci, & Chandra, 2015). Business managers can use the study's findings to evaluate the effectiveness of their current employee improvement strategies. Employers can also use this study's findings to develop training plans for new and existing managers. Managers could draw upon the study's results to learn about successful employee improvement strategies and to improve managerial business practices.

**Implications for Social Change**

Employee performance is vital for organizational performance. Employees who perform well improve job performance, organizational effectiveness, and overall business performance. The findings of this study contributed to social change by providing an understanding of what indicates employee performance. Successfully managed companies provide communities and employees with secure employment opportunities and decreased unemployment rates (Baily & Bosworth, 2014). Scholars can use this study's results to advance the practice and examination of factors that indicate managers' performance, as well as to identify strategies to improve organizational effectiveness. Scholars and employers could draw upon findings to contribute to positive social change and provide information for knowledgeable managers to improve their performances and create productive and engaged workforces in their organizations and their communities.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to show which strategies business managers use to improve employee performance. The literature review included data from various organizations that were appropriate for a qualitative single-case study. The literature provided the framework for the studied problem, along with an objective view of employee engagement in Massachusetts. The lack of strategies to improve employees' performances is a threat to businesses (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014; Banihashemi, Hossini, Golizadeh, & Sankaran, 2017). Company leaders consider their employees their most valuable assets and have realized they must engage workers to achieve organizational goals. In today's fast-moving economy, business leaders face fierce competition regardless of their business's size, scope, and market focus. Business managers need to establish and maintain employee improvement strategies to stay competitive. Managers who do not implement employee improvement strategies may struggle to improve their organizations and achieve their goals (Berbary, 2014).

Background information for this study came from a comprehensive review of literature that directly or indirectly showed improved employee performance. Keywords searched included *case study, performance improvement, motivational strategies, employee development, performance feedback, career planning,* and *mentoring.* An exhaustive search of the literature revealed strategies used by business managers to improve employee performance. I organized the literature review by subject matter and content. Four components of employee improvement strategies indicated successful strategic management: (a) employee development plans, (b) employee rewards, (c) job description modification, and (d) employee involvement. The majority of sources from various databases were peer-reviewed articles and publications published within the last 5 years. Table 1 shows the number of articles by source and publication date.

Table 1

*Literature Review Reference Content*

| Reference type | Total | < 5 years | > 5 years | % < 5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer-reviewed journals | 88 | 84 | 4 | 95 |
| Books | 12 | 10 | 2 | 83 |
| Total | 100 | 94 | 6 | 94 |

**Vroom's Expectancy Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. Vroom found that people believe that effort increases performance. Employees are generally motivated to become more involved in work if they come to believe that the efforts they make will be reflected in high performance. Employees are motivated when they work harder and are more satisfied with their tasks (Furlich, 2016).

Employees are motivated to perform efficiently to receive rewards (Blotnicky, Mann, & Joy, 2015; Hema Malini & Washington, 2014). Employees may be motivated to achieve their individual goals if they trust that a positive correlation exists between effort and performance. Employees observe results that indicate desirable rewards and feel that the reward satisfies an important need; they then consider the work required to satisfy the need worthwhile. Expectancy theory comprises three components: (a) the employee's expectation that working hard results in the desired performance level, (b) the employee's expectation that working hard will provide rewards, and (c) the employee's perception that the outcome of hard work hard is worth the effort or value associated with the work.

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**Employee Performance**

Employee performance is defined as how an employee fulfills their job duties and executes their required tasks. Nyberg, Pieper, and Trevor (2016) believed that employers strive to improve employee performance to achieve organizational goals and objectives. According to Shields et al. (2015), employee performance comprises organizational activities, assignments, and tasks. Managers should concentrate on employee training and development to ensure improved employee performance (Shields et al., 2015). Employees with improved performance achieve their organizations' strategic objectives, increase profits, incur low HR costs, and increase production and sales. Hill, Jones, and Schilling (2014) argued that employee performance levels indicate the achievement of strategic organizational goals. Managers who empower and involve employees in decision-making processes may enhance employee performance. Employee decision-making and empowerment are critical because they indicate employee accountability and responsibility (Saunila, Pekkola, & Ukko, 2014).

Organizational leaders can develop skills within their employees by involving them in the decision-making process. Saunila et al. (2014) suggested that organizational leaders should develop innovative capabilities in employees to improve their performances. Anitha (2014) argued that organizational leaders rely on employee performance to accomplish strategic objectives. Moreover, leaders can achieve their strategic objectives in supportive working environments and work cultures of employee coordination and cooperation. Thus, employee performance levels indicate the attainment of organizational goals.

According to Huang et al. (2016) organizational engagement indicates employee performance, comprising orientation toward achievements, targets, or goals. According to Breevaart et al. (2014), organizational engagement occurs when workers are passionate, committed, and motivated to perform their roles and responsibilities. Mone and London (2014) suggested that excellent employee performance requires the strategic organizational implementation of employee improvement procedures and policies. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) added that only effective and vision-oriented leaders can ensure organizational engagement, influencing and motivating workers to achieve goals and objectives in line with the organization's mission and vision.

Leaders impact employee performance (Atmojo, 2015); successful leaders help improve that performance. Vidyarthi, Anand, and Liden (2014) indicated that job performance closely correlates with task interdependence levels and power distance, which is a measurement of a leader's closeness and influence on employee performance. Atmojo (2015) suggested that leaders develop an environment of task dependency, assisting and guiding their employees at every stage of assigned tasks.

Leaders who implement task interdependence provide clarity and assistance for employees' tasks, assignments, and job roles. Vidyarthi et al. (2014) added that employee interdependence creates lower levels of employee stress. Leaders who engage in employee performance management monitor and measure the expected results. Houldsworth and Brewster (2016) noted that organizational leaders who use comprehensive performance management systems retain and attract skillful workers. According to Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright (2015), employee performance management includes the organizational strategies, policies, and practices used to establish expectations.

Leaders can use comprehensive performance management systems to improve overall organizational performance. Managers using the process provide feedback and explain expected organizational performance goals to employees. Van Waeyenberg, Decramer, and Vanderstraeten (2015) argued that employee performance management results in performance excellence, providing each employee with specific and clear expectations for performance. According to Mone and London (2014), organizational leaders use performance reviews to determine the need for workers' training and development. Leaders also use performance reviews to offer compensation and benefits and to transfer, terminate, and promote workers (Mone & London, 2014). Poor-performing employees may face termination or demotion; in contrast, organizational leaders offer promotions, training, development, and increased compensation and benefits if workers maintain a record of solid performance.

Qualified and successful HR associates train company managers to accomplish their roles and responsibilities efficiently (Budworth et al., 2015). According to Budworth, Latham, and Manroop (2015), an organization's HR department is critical for the efficient administration of a performance management system. Effective performance management systems indicate how and when employees need to act as well as the value of their contributions to their organizations (Klingner, Nalbandian, & Llorens, 2015). Workers identify their stances for obtaining goals and meeting performance standards as part of training, career development, and promotion. Bhamu and Sangwan (2014) discovered that performance management is critical for manufacturing companies. Belekoukias, Garza-Reyes, and Kumar (2014) found that managers gain insights about how to increase employee motivation levels by reviewing workers' productivity and achievement through performance management systems (Belekoukias et al., 2014).

Managers review employee productivity and performance to identify gaps in training and development programs. According to Bradler, Dur, Neckermann, and Non (2016), managers encourage employees to use their talents in productive ways. However, employees may not always demonstrate their full abilities as they face up and downs in work output. Sometimes, individual workers maintain the same performance record and talent usage (Bradler et al., 2016). Klingner et al. (2015) argued that managers should help and empower their teams, thus elevating employee engagement levels. Managers who engage with and closely relate with workers provide timely guidance and assistance (Klingner et al., 2015).

Communication is essential for improving employee performance (Bradler et al., 2016). Managers who successfully communicate with each other can fully understand performance issues (Bradler et al., 2016). Consistent feedback and clear communication lead to organizational success (Gong, He, & Zhong, 2015), indicating the need for managers to communicate with and inform employees about areas of improvement. Employees prefer genuine and straightforward interactions with their managers when accomplishing tasks and assignments (Gong et al., 2015). Sincere managers who establish judgment-free workspaces are better able to resolve challenges and foster organizational communication.

During employee performance management, HR managers track workers' performance over time to determine compensation and benefits. Podgórski (2015) stated that HR managers should ensure the practice of results in fair, reliable, and consistent ways. Landy, Zedeck, and Cleveland (2017) argued that, after reviewing performance, HR managers should communicate with the employees and their supervisors or managers. Then, managers guide workers if they face challenges while performing their assigned tasks and responsibilities.

Supervisors and managers must employ performance measures established by the company and authenticated by higher-level executives (Alfalla-Luque, Marin-Garcia, & Medina-Lopez, 2015). Managers should communicate all set standards and milestones for employee performance. Leaders who use performance management should develop employee accountability and responsibility, thus promoting employee improvement (Gong et al., 2015). Moreover, managers who successfully use performance management systems monitor and guide workers, promoting efficiency and flexibility. Firm leaders align employee goals with departmental and organizational goals.

Firm leaders use performance management systems to maximize employee performance and plan succession (Matthews, 2015). Leaders who use performance management systems foster continuous performance improvement in employees (Gong et al., 2015). Managers using such systems monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback and guidance on employee performance. One advantage of the performance management system is that it connects workers' performance to rewards, compensation, benefits, and recognition (Matthews, 2015). Organizational leaders offer these attributes to workers based on employee performance results measured in the performance management system.

**Employee Development Plan**

An employee development plan includes the benefits, compensation, rewards, promotions, or growth an employer commits to providing (Wise, 2014). An employee development plan is a set of activities and practices used by organizational leaders to promote employees from one position to another or from one status to another (Poell & Van Der Krogt, 2016). Because every person is an individual, each employee requires a unique professional development plan. Managers must consider every worker’s input when developing employee development plans to meet expectations (Poell & Van Der Krogt, 2016).

Employers should concentrate on mutual advantages when creating employee development plans so that both parties benefit (Ok & Vandenberghe, 2016). Developed and trained workers are motivated to perform better (Ok & Vandenberghe, 2016). Leaders should always consider their organizations’ futures overall (Lewis & Donaldson-Feilder, 2014). Undeveloped workers could result in the loss of talent, as workers may seek opportunities elsewhere (Lewis & Donaldson-Feilder, 2014).

According to Wise (2016), employee development addresses various issues, including a lack of training, career growth, and strategic implementation of the organization’s policies and practices. Effective training is necessary for employee development and performance (Noe, Wilk, Mullen, & Wanek, 2014); as such, organizational leaders must include training in employee development plans (Wise, 2016). According to Dhar (2015), training is not the only way to improve employee performance and retain workers, as leaders also need to provide attractive benefits packages. Managers must also consider career growth as foundational for employee development (Dhar, 2015).

Employee development should include the promotion of leadership, management, and supervisory skills employees can use to accomplish their tasks in timely and efficient ways (Yap & Webber, 2015). When they receive career growth opportunities, workers feel satisfied and secure about their future well-being (Wise, 2016). Managers can use successful employee development plans to foster employee loyalty as well (Wise, 2016), creating and aligning employee development with organizational development (Yap & Webber, 2015). By concurrently developing both their organizations and their employees, managers can set achievable and realistic objectives.

Employers should frequently monitor the progress of employee development plans, encouraging workers based on their performance levels (Urbancová & Hudáková, 2015). Managers should meet with their employees to discuss development, reviewing the quality and quantity of workers' performance (Urbancová & Hudáková, 2015). Consistent worker feedback is crucial for successful employee developmental processes (Chang, Liu, & Lin, 2015).

The structure and implementation of employee development indicate overall organizational performance (Cascio, 2014). Employers who invest in their workers improve satisfaction, reduce turnover and worker absenteeism, and enhance productivity. Managers who invest in workers align their organizational interests and objectives with workers' interests and objectives (Burke & Noumair, 2015). Proper alignment may lead to lower employee stress levels because employees can concentrate on their allotted tasks and performance (Burke & Noumair, 2015). The quality of employee development plans indicates the quality of workers' tasks (Cascio, 2014).

HR development plans should include employee retention as a key objective (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017). To retain workers, organizations should invest more resources and implement strategies through which both employer and employee benefit (Wise, 2016). Mangers who introduce and implement well-thought-out plans provide workers with opportunities and instructions to increase capabilities and career advancement and improve organizational performance. Cascio (2014) believed that workers equipped with necessary skills successfully perform their assigned tasks. Development plans must align with employees' objectives.

Burke and Noumair (2015) suggested that managers pay attention to their business goals and objectives. Because employers cannot achieve organizational objectives without employee performance, managers should create development plans with workers' interests in mind. Employers must provide employees with more benefits and attributes to satisfy and retain skillful workers. Mone and London (2014) argued that employers should refer to their development plan when framing employee milestones and objectives. Mone and London further advised managers to consider both organizational and employee objectives to achieve strategic performance goals. Moreover, they specified that employers who do not align their objectives with employees' objectives are isolated and cannot achieve their goals (Mone & London, 2014).

Employers should consider both short- and long-term employee and company objectives. Discovering employees' key skills, expertise, and capabilities is an excellent way for managers to successfully engage with workers (Mone & London, 2014). Managers should also consider workers' competencies, offering relevant training to build upon workers' competencies. Trained employees develop and enhance their existing skills, approaches, expertise, and experience (Mone & London, 2014).

A company's HR department must have a vision of workers' performance (Zwick, 2015). Trainers should boost employee performance by providing advanced training. Trained employees enrich their skillsets and give their companies competitive advantages. Sharf (2016) stated that managers who provide employees with advanced training of their roles and responsibilities add value to their performances; trained workers are more efficient and effective, and achieve company goals. Employers could use development plans to retain top talent, as well (Zwick, 2015). Managers motivate workers by offering benefits, promotions, and compensations to highly efficient employees who contribute to the company. Workers who feel appreciated and valued by their managers relate being highly satisfied (Sharf, 2016).

Employers must implement employee development plans to advance and promote workers with more skills, expertise, and proficiencies (According to Tatoglu, Glaister, & Demirbag, 2016). Leaders who develop internal candidates can fill vacant positions with internal employees (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014). Internal employees are more useful for companies because they require less training (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Employees who understand organizational culture, policies, strategies, and procedures will continue to work rather than receive training on company time, as outside hires would. Advancing internal candidates decreases organizational expenses, reducing or eliminating the need to spend money on recruiting and training new employees (El Ouirdi, El Ouirdi, Segers, & Pais, 2016). Employers must consider taking employees onboard while managing talent, as it can result in collecting important ideas from workers.

**Rewarding Employees**

Employee rewards are various compensation and benefits provided to workers based on their performances (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Employers establish employee reward systems to motivate, manage, and monitor employee performance (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Leaders who provide meaningful rewards positively affect workers' behaviors and attitudes. Shields et al. (2015) believed that rewarding employees is a successful employee improvement strategy, as reward systems reflect employee satisfaction levels. Employees feel positive about and wish the company well if they receive fair rewards. Fundamentally, rewarding employees provides workers with returns for their mental and physical efforts (Shields et al., 2015).

Workers' contributions provide competitive market advantages (De Gieter & Hofmans, 2015). Employees do not directly help a company achieve its objectives, but they assist by improving operational performance, which results in the company reaching its goals (Shields et al., 2015). Employees provide physical and mental work in exchange for monetary compensation; not surprisingly, workers who receive inadequate compensation or rewards perform poorly. According to Guerci and Pedrini (2014), every company should implement systems that provide four types of rewards: benefits, compensation, appreciation, and recognition.

Many employers struggle with establishing successful reward systems (Renard & Snelgar, 2016), often lacking one or two of the four main components, usually appreciation and recognition. Employers might also fail to align the reward system with corporate strategies. De Gieter and Hofmans (2015) argued that employers might struggle to reward specific employee behaviors. Employees who exhibit behaviors that indicate improved organizational performance should receive more rewards (De Gieter & Hofmans, 2015). As such, employers should develop compensation strategies to reward workers according to their work or contribution to organizational goals.

HR managers should develop compensation strategies to reward productive employee behaviors, such as arriving early, staying late, producing low-defect work, finishing tasks on time, and contributing new ideas (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014). Managers who use compensation and benefits strategies should encourage employee innovation and creativity. Business owners should motivate employees by compensating them for extra work and services (Shields et al., 2015). Employers who offer commensurate compensation may reduce the likelihood of employer-employee conflicts, as employees obtain rewards for their extra work and contributions.

HR and sustainability managers should reach a consensus in considering employees' work expectations to achieve sustainable and strategic development (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014). Managers need to offer rewards to improve employee satisfaction and motivation levels (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014). In addition, managers should develop leniency between employee behaviors and strategic company goals (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014). Leniency between worker and company objectives is highly useful for managers, as they set the behaviors of their subordinates by offering rewards (Jin & Huang, 2014).

Babin, Boles, and Griffin (2015) noted that employees should receive rewards for their contributions to their organizations. Encouraging positive employee behavior is crucial because workers have their own values, perceptions, preferences, objectives, and interests (Babin et al., 2015). Managers should develop motivational tools so that subordinates feel positive about achieving company goals and positive change (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014); these may include reward programs designed to retain and satisfy workers (Jin & Huang, 2014). Employers design strategic reward systems for their employees to align workers' input with sustained competitive advantages (Babin et al., 2015).

Jin and Huang (2014) suggested that organizational leaders develop reward programs based on workers' desired performance levels and behaviors. Managers must communicate with workers about the programs and the rewards (Babin et al., 2015). Reward programs should include details of all features, benefits, and compensations offered to the workers.

Employers use motivation strategies, both financial and nonfinancial, to enhance employee performance (Reeve, 2014). Nonmonetary strategies include showing appreciation through acts such as writing thank-you letters or celebrating employee birthdays (Reeve, 2014). Managers can motivate employees by providing training, arranging recreational events, offering paid leave, and recognizing employees in meetings (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017). In turn, managers who use financial motivational strategies might offer competitive salary packages, medical facilities, compensation and remuneration for extra work, pick-and-drop facilities, bonuses, and medical insurance (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017).

Employers can use nonfinancial motivation strategies to reward workers and significantly impact employee performance (Haider, Aamir, Hamid, & Hashim, 2015). Haider et al. (2015) argued that financial motivation strategies are more successful in improving employee performance than are nonfinancial means. Chelladurai and Kerwin (2017) stated that workers desire recognition from their respective managers. Nevertheless, most employees work with organizations that provide benefits, compensation, and salary packages. Organizational success correlates with employee motivation, as employees are generally an employer's only means of leading a company to success (Haider et al., 2015).

Recognition is acknowledging workers in front of their peers for achieving specific accomplishments (Závadský, Hitka, & Potkány, 2015). Managers who recognize employees' performance in front of others motivate workers to perform at higher levels (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017). In doing so, managers also provide examples of high-performing workers to others as a means of motivation. One way that managers express gratitude for employee actions and achievements is with employee reward systems (Závadský et al., 2015). Chelladurai and Kerwin (2017) suggested that managers motivate employees by acknowledging brilliant performances, encouraging desired employee behaviors, and sending personal notes.

Workers value rewards for their work, which may come in the form of appreciation, respect, recognition, empowerment, involvement, and appreciation (Neckermann, Cueni, & Frey, 2014). Závadský et al. (2015) suggested that managers could motivate employees with recognition programs. Only a few employees focus on financial benefits; most prefer recognition for their efforts (Neckermann et al., 2014). Employees may work more efficiently when they receive noncash rewards because they appreciate value and recognition. Managers can provide nonmonetary attention such as *employee of the month* awards to motivate employees to work to their full performance and production capacities.

To improve employee performance, productivity, satisfaction, and motivation, employers should consider all organizational objectives when designing reward programs (Bradler et al., 2016). Organizations often err in rewarding achievements or behaviors that create problems in achieving other business goals (Bradler et al., 2016). In the case of teamwork, employers may fail to evaluate individual performance and only offer bonuses based on overall team performance. When they give bonuses to noncontributing employees, leaders demotivate the productive workers who contribute to their teams (Lazaroiu, 2015). Rewards cost real money and time; nonfinancial bonuses require managers to share their time with workers in meetings and provide workers with recognition. In doing so, employers find financial returns, happier customers, reduced defects, and rapid deliveries (Aerts, Kraft, & Lang, 2015).

To ensure the equitable distribution of preferred rewards, managers could use profit-sharing strategies, taking an agreed percentage of the organization’s profits and distribute the funds to workers (Aerts, Kraft, & Lang, 2015). Profit-sharing is also a way for employers to reduce their fixed costs (Choi, Kim, & Do Noh, 2015). Manufacturing companies use profit-sharing to keep their costs down, especially when the workload is low (Choi et al., 2015).

As noted by Choi et al. (2015), the primary purpose of profit-sharing is to reward workers. Raddats, Burton, and Ashman (2015) found that employees feel encouraged to continue working and produce more units in manufacturing companies when their companies offer profit-sharing. Most employers' profit-sharing plans require workers to remain employed with them for a set period. As a result, profit-sharing reduces employee turnover, as workers remain with the company to earn this additional money. Jabbour, Jugend, de Sousa Jabbour, Gunasekaran, and Latan (2015), however, disagreed that profit-sharing indicates reduced employee turnover, indicating that workers might feel demotivated by poor management and profit distribution.

**Modifying Job Description**

Modifying job descriptions is a crucial change management strategy. Employers change employee roles and responsibilities in certain job positions (titles) due to organizational and project needs (Marinova, Peng, Lorinkova, Van Dyne, & Chiaburu, 2015; Schwalbe, 2015). Managers modify job roles and responsibilities to stay within budget, avoid employee dissatisfaction and turnover, and enhance worker adoption and employability. Marinova et al. (2015) added that managers could obtain the desired employee performance results by modifying job descriptions. Job redesigns may also be a way to align employees with changes in business processes, technology and systems, and organizational structures (Marinova et al., 2015).

According to Crawford, Rich, Buckman, and Bergeron (2014), managers change or modify job requirements to meet the changes in market demand and employer expectations. Job description modifications entail changing employees' job requirements (roles and responsibilities), which may result in the inability of employees to perform their current job requirements. Job description modification does not occur because of the employee's inability to perform current job requirements but because of changes in the organizational requirements for specific jobs. Burke and Noumair (2015) defined job descriptions as the predetermined requirements, roles, and responsibilities that an employee must accomplish while working for a company.

When designing job descriptions, managers may also develop and change management plans and strategies to increase worker adaptability and reduce resistance (Burke & Noumair, 2015). Also important is for change managers to improve employee adaptability, utilization, and proficiency in considering how the changes may affect workers (Pugh, 2016). These enhancements often lead to improved benefits realization, return on investments, value creation, and attainment of desired outcomes and results (Pugh, 2016). When managers clearly describe employee responsibilities, workers who have new job descriptions can perform efficiently (Burke & Noumair, 2015). Improved productivity indicates reduced costs and increased organizational profitability.

Lozano, Ceulemans, and Seatter (2015) studied the scope and importance of restructuring job descriptions and requirements, finding that employers change employee job roles and responsibilities to adjust to organizational goals. Hassard and Morris (2017) stated that managers need to revise job descriptions and alter job requirements to enhance employee performance; in doing so, managers must consider employees' current job requirements and the challenges workers face. When developing new job descriptions, managers need to review the environmental aspects of organizational culture (Hassard & Morris, 2017). According to Marinova et al. (2015), HR managers should alter job requirements so employees can fulfill corporate goals.

The nature of work is changing rapidly; therefore, employers should change job descriptions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Rapid technological development requires industrial changes in employees' job structures, descriptions, and requirements. Dubin (2017) indicated that modifying job roles and responsibilities results in easier recruitment and hiring processes.

When a position opens up at an organization, the manager must take steps to fill the vacancy. Employers first review the job description and add any requirements deemed necessary for the job. As defined by Jundt, Shoss, and Huang (2015), a job description comprises a list of roles and responsibilities, including the employee's required education, experience, skills, or background. Next, they post the job to include a clear understanding of job requirements, roles, and responsibilities (Peppard & Ward, 2016). Hartnett (2014) argued that employers who post updated job descriptions or advertisements attract the applicants who possess the required skills.

Managers should review job applications from candidates who possess the skills, experience, expertise, competencies, and capabilities needed for the job (Pató, 2015).

Hiring competent and qualified applicants adds value to organizations because the employees' skills match the job requirements (Dillahunt, Bose, Diwan, & Chen-Phang, 2016). Thus, managers should receive input from existing workers to update job descriptions and hire employees who can help the company achieve its strategic objectives.

Employers can protect their competitive advantage by regularly reviewing and changing job descriptions (Ahmad, Bosua, & Scheepers, 2014). Technological advancements and changes in organizational scope often necessitate changes in employee roles and responsibilities. Employers with complex and traditional job descriptions can lose their talented employees. In addition, when employers fail to distinguish between job requirements and employee expertise, they may be unable to secure the desired productivity and performance levels. Failure to modify job descriptions could cause increased employee turnover rates and higher company costs (Derks, Duin, Tims, & Bakker, 2015). Employers must hire new employees to fill vacant positions, a process that consumes company resources and time.

Job modification results in improved employee performance; however, managers should only modify job descriptions for ease and adaptability (Jundt, Shoss, & Huang, 2015). Employers can modify job descriptions to achieve strategic objectives and connect employee and company objectives. Dubin (2017) suggested that managers' avoidance of modification results in dissatisfied employees because the workers might not feel comfortable with their existing job roles. Eliminating undesired or unattainable functions from job descriptions may have a positive effect on employee performance levels.

Managers may need to change a job description for several reasons, including business needs, staff levels, product demand, and technological advancement in the business process (Taylor, Peoples, & Petersen, 2016). Taylor et al. (2016) argued that changing a worker’s tasks and responsibilities may reduce the expense of hiring new workers or paying for extra working hours from other employees. Managers should take a systematic approach to revisions to ensure the employee understands the changes, including how to perform the new job responsibilities and to obtain help from leaders if challenges arise (Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016).

**Involving Employees**

Depending on their specialties and backgrounds, employers could foster employee involvement by engaging, participating with, and listening to employees (Jones, Kalmi, Kato, & Makinen, 2017). To achieve strategic objectives, employers should involve workers in operations, decision-making, and functions, as feasible. Employee involvement is critical in the workplace because involved employees help managers by accomplishing organizational tasks. Carmeli, Brammer, Gomes, and Tarba (2017) believed that employee involvement is a social identity for workers. By engaging employees, employers consider and incorporate workers’ suggestions, inputs, and contributions.

Employee involvement is practical for decisions that pertain to workers’ jobs and can influence employee performance, as well (Bayraktar, Araci, Karacay, & Calisir, 2017). The empowerment of workers is critical in corporate structure, as employers allow nonmanagerial workers to make decisions. Soulat and Nasir (2017) found that employee involvement leads to improved performance and employee development. In addition, Pettigrew (2014) argued that employers engage employee participation when making key decisions.

Employees are an organization's main tools (Soulat & Nasir, 2017). Workers' key input may give the company more opportunities to survive and compete in the market. Involved workers understand the main objectives of decisions and act accordingly. Employees who understand top management's core objectives effectively execute work based on the decisions made. Laschinger and Read (2017) believed that involved employees help their managers make creative decisions. Involved employees also feel a sense of ownership because they believe their managers value their opinions and ideas. Employees feel motivated when managers encourage their creative and innovative suggestions; as such, involvement inspires innovation.

Employee involvement occurs when employees directly impact actions and decisions, ultimately affecting their jobs (Ramesh & Ravi, 2017). When employers make decisions to achieve their organizational goals, there are direct effects on employees and their jobs. Ramesh and Ravi (2017) believed that employees responsible for achieving those goals are likely to change their patterns of practice. Therefore, employers should encourage employee involvement, enabling workers to contribute to organizational improvement and success.

A multilevel model is useful for providing a culture of innovation and employee involvement (Smith, Wallace, Vandenberg, & Mondore, 2016). The model requires input about business decisions from employees of all levels. Innovation that occurs through employee involvement may provide an organization with benefits and enhanced organizational performance. Innovation also indicates improved employee morale, as employees feel positive about their managers, job roles, responsibilities, organizational goals, and objectives. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) believed that employers who encourage positive employee behavior improve employee performance because employees follow their managers' instructions and suggestions. Similarly, good morale indicates effective rapport and close communication between employees and managers.

Power distance might indicate how empowered employees feel (Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2016). Empowerment reduces power distance and creates a work environment of cooperation and support among employees, managers, and organizational leaders. High levels of employee empowerment and involvement lead to improved worker productivity. Both employee involvement and empowerment have a broader scope and effect on employee performance. Moreover, employees who independently complete their assigned tasks perform better. Oloko and Ogutu (2017) added that when managers assign tasks and responsibilities to their employees, they help complete the work. Employees require independence in the workplace to feel autonomous and responsible for their organizations and management.

According to Tessem (2014), organizations grant independence to workers for many reasons, the first of which is encouragement. Employers who allow or even encourage employees to make mistakes help workers develop, gain experience, and learn from their errors. Managers who encourage employees to learn from their mistakes help employees to perform similar or new tasks successfully. Empowered or independent workers also develop self-dependency and are thus less likely to rely on others when completing their tasks. Another reason employers allow independence is to improve employees' efficiency.

According to Eldor and Harpaz (2016), a manager is only responsible for ensuring workers' empowerment and involvement. Managers should positively impact their management on worker satisfaction levels. In their communication with workers, managers should seek to develop solidarity and decrease anxiety. Sok and O'Cass (2015) suggested that managers should adopt more employee-centered leadership approaches, striving to understand their workers' behaviors and suggesting actions to improve employee performance. A manager should gather the opinions of skillful workers to make decisions about production, plans, and strategies.

Employees respond positively when managers involve them in the decision-making process (Tariq, Jan, & Ahmad, 2016). Active employee involvement indicates high levels of team cohesion, accountability, and employee satisfaction. As a result, relationships between managers and employees develop. Although employee involvement strategies provide workers with increased independence, employees do not become isolated from their team members and managers; instead, involved employees develop better relationships with their managers and other workers (Zhang, Song, Tsui, & Fu, 2014). Each employee reaps the benefits of receiving help from and giving help to other employees. Employee involvement also improves team performance, as team members coordinate with each other to accomplish their assigned tasks.

Marchington (2015) believed that high levels of employee involvement cause organizational innovation. Involved employees help employers to design an innovative workplace culture, and employees who have stakes in organizational sustainability and growth offer ideas. Employees resolve workplace issues and remove upcoming barriers with strong problem-solving skills. Marin-Garcia and Bonavia (2015) argued that involved employees could resolve procedural, products, and policy problems. Because employees see problems from different perspectives than their managers, workers can offer creative and useful solutions for resolving workplace issues (Marin-Garcia & Bonavia, 2015). Managers who encourage employee involvement can creatively and innovatively achieve organizational goals. Moreover, employee involvement leads to decreased stress levels and improved employee performance levels.

## Transition

Section 1 presented employee improvement strategies with a focus on how employee skills and training levels contribute to organizational productivity and profitability. There was a discussion of the study's problem, followed by an explanation of the importance of researching emerging employee behavioral theories. A comprehensive literature review also appeared.

Section 2 shows the research method and design suitable for this study and presents the research steps for thinking, understanding, writing, and collecting information. Section 2 includes the study's purpose, the researcher's role, and the criteria for the targeted participant. Data collection and analysis techniques, including methods to ensure reliability and research validity, are additional components of Section 2. Section 3 begins with an introduction and includes the purpose statement, research question, and findings. Section 3 further shows application to professional practice, implications for social change/behaviors, and recommendations for action and further study. The section concludes with researcher reflections.

# Section 2: The Project

Employees enrich a company's human capital, and organizational managers need to develop and implement strategies to retain and develop employees. Section 2 includes the purpose statement, the researcher's role, the participants, population and sampling, ethical research practices, and the research method and design. In this section, I present the data collection process, including the instrument, collection techniques, data organization process, and the research's reliability and validity.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how business managers improve employee performance. The target population was three Central Massachusetts business managers who implemented successful employee improvement strategies. The results of this study have implications for positive social change; business managers can use the findings to improve business practices, workplace performance, and economic growth. The study also provided additional information on the effectiveness of flexible workplaces.

## Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in the data collection process is to collect, organize, analyze and interpret the data, and report reliable and valid findings. During data collection, researchers strive to recognize and prevent bias from occurring during the data collection process to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings (Koch et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers should strive to understand problematic issues that may have adverse effects on the study's trustworthiness and to explain the strategy for overcoming bias and threats to trustworthiness (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Invited individuals received detailed information about the study (see Appendix A) to ensure they made informed decisions to participate. Participants received consent forms to review and sign, confirming their willingness to participate in the study before engaging in interviews. The interviews occurred at their businesses in private rooms with closed doors. Turner (2010) noted that it is easier to conduct interviews in comfortable environments so participants can share information without distractions. I created an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to guide the interview process (Koch et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Scholars establish interview protocol to improve research credibility and elicit data indicative of participants' real-world contexts (Yin, 2014). Researchers with proper interview protocols ensure that interview questions do not include bias and that findings accurately reflect participants' real-world contexts and experiences (Yin, 2014). The data collection process entailed compiling data provided by participants in semistructured interviews. Each participant responded to the same seven interview questions (see Appendix C), providing holistic accounts and detailed descriptions of successful employee improvement strategies.

Respondent confidentiality was necessary to protect participant identities; accordingly, no real names are included. The *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Subjects of Research, 1979) provides a summary of ethical principles and guidelines that researchers use to protect human subjects. The *Belmont Report* provides ways scholars can distinguish between research and practice, the three basic ethical principles, and the application of those principles. In addition to respecting participants' confidentiality, ideas, and opinions, I have accurately reported their words.

The *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Subjects of Research, 1979) dictates observance of three basic ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The following protocol ensured adherence to these principles: (a) provide a consent form to ensure participants were well-informed of the study's purpose, (b) provide an assessment of the potential risks and benefits of participation, and (c) include a participant selection process.

Yin (2014) recommended a case study and interview protocol to protect participants consisting of (a) asking permission to conduct the interview, (b) establishing and providing substantive questions to address the research question, and (c) explaining member checking at follow-up interviews. The location for each interview was nonthreatening, private, and comfortable. No information obtained during data collection was in violation of the law or participants' rights. The strategies shared by participants complied with industry best practices and specific organizational guidelines.

## Participants

The study population comprised 30 Central Massachusetts business managers; the sample for this single case study consisted of three Central Massachusetts business managers. The three participants possessed and provided a wealth of experience on the research topic. Selecting unsuitable participants for qualitative data collection causes unreliable data and weak results and has adverse effects on the study's validity (Dasgupta, 2015; Koch et al., 2014), thus indicating the necessity to sample correctly. The selection criteria for participants who could best answer the research question were those in management positions who had used successful employee improvement strategies.

Participant recruitment and data collection did not begin until Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) members reviewed and approved the study's proposal. Gatekeepers often control access to research participants and influence participants' choices to participate in research (Boggiano, Harris, & Nguyen, 2015; Oye, Sorenson, & Glasdam, 2016). Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, and Fisher (2014) recommended providing gatekeepers with a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, the measures selected to avoid ethical dilemmas, a copy of the interview questions, and the importance of participants to the study and business practice. Upper management at the research sites served as gatekeepers; as such, they received explanations of the purpose and nature of the study, the steps taken to protect participants' confidentiality, the data collection method, and the length of the interviews.

Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri (2016) noted that fostering and strengthening trusting relationships between researchers and participants is central to qualitative studies. Researchers who build trusting relationships with participants help respondents feel comfortable and willing to reveal valuable information during the interviews (Petrova et al., 2016). A strategy for sustaining meaningful participant relationships for this study included offering each participant the chance to set the place, date, and time for the interview (see Yin, 2014). Furthermore, trustful relationships emerged from honest dialogue with participants about the study's purpose, with ethical principles upheld at all times.

## Research Method and Design

Qualitative research methodology and a single-case design were the means for exploring the strategies business managers use to improve employee performance. An understanding of the contemporary phenomenon and multiple data sources (Yin, 2014) were necessary for this study. A single-case study design was appropriate because the focus was on a single company.

### Research Method

Research methodology can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (Maxwell, 2016). A qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore the nuances of the phenomenon in this research. Scholars use qualitative inquiry to understand participants' ideas and views and to collect in-depth data (Zuofa & Ochieng, 2014). Qualitative researchers often make discoveries about open, dynamic systems through ongoing stages of development, such as boundary changes and other changes, to achieve the study's goal (Cairney & St Denny, 2015).

The quantitative research method is formal, objective, and useful for describing, testing, and examining cause-and-effect relationships (Anitha, 2014). With a quantitative approach, scholars use numerical data to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Hoare & Hoe, 2013), testing for correlations between variables and hypotheses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I did not seek to test hypotheses; rather, I explored employee improvement strategies.

Mixed-methods research is appropriate when a single method will not provide sufficient understanding of the underlying research problem and when the researcher lacks sufficient data to develop and generalize the findings (McKim, 2015; Yin, 2014). Mixed-methods scholars respond to the research problem with both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Alexander, 2014; Roulston, 2016). Morse and Cheek (2014) noted that quantitative elements are often the primary components of mixed-methods studies, with qualitative elements having a secondary role. Because both quantitative and qualitative methods were not necessary to answer the research question, the mixed-methods approach was not suitable for this study. Thus, the qualitative approach was appropriate to explore employee improvement strategies.

**Research Design**

The research design dictates the plan for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Dasgupta, 2015). In this project, I used a case study design. Other designs considered but not chosen included phenomenology and ethnography. Case study, phenomenological, and ethnographic designs provide different framing approaches for the questions used for data collection and understanding a phenomenon (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014).

A case study design was the most advantageous for exploring successful employee improvement strategies. The critical nature of a case underpinned by a well-tested theory is the hallmark of case designs (Dasgupta, 2015; Yin, 2014). Carolan, Forbat, and Smith (2016) identified two main advantages of the case study design, the first being that its flexibility provides opportunities to gain holistic and in-depth characteristics of the social process from multiple perspectives. The second advantage is the ability to gain access to and interview participants who are foundational to the studied topic and who possess conceptual knowledge from within the natural context of the occurrence (Carolan et al., 2016). Case studies are appropriate when researchers ask open-ended interview questions and converse with participants to achieve a contextual understanding of an event (Rule & John, 2015). In case studies, scholars often use in-depth, open-ended questions and probes to gain full descriptions of events and situations related to the research topic (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Therefore, the case study design was appropriate for the inclusion of multiple data collection approaches to explore the strategies business managers use to improve their employees' performance.

The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. Researchers use phenomenology to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences with an unexplored phenomenon (Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), which was not the purpose of this study. Therefore, phenomenology was useful to collect the qualitative data needed to address the problem statement. According to Pearson, Albon, and Hubball (2015), scholars use phenomenology to explore shared phenomenological experiences among several individuals to learn and understand an event. Finding the meaning and essence of participants' lived experiences was not the study's primary purpose; therefore, the phenomenological design was the wrong approach.

Scholars use ethnography to analyze, uncover, and describe cultural experiences and practices (Floersch, Longhofer, & Suskewicz, 2014). Researchers in ethnographic studies conduct field observations over extended periods and interview group members to gain in-depth accounts of their experiences; next, researchers use the data to present the meaning of the cultural experiences (Pearson et al., 2015; Robinson, 2013). Data analysis in ethnographic research includes the use of a recursive process to develop themes that indicate the relationships among cultural behaviors (Pearson et al., 2015; Robinson, 2013). The ethnographic design was not suitable because this study did not entail an exploration of culture.

Adequate and appropriate sampling is critical for data saturation in qualitative studies (Morse, 2015). To achieve data saturation, researchers collect and analyze data until no new information emerges (Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). Data saturation comes from selecting the appropriate participants and by collecting adequate and relevant documentation for data analysis. Similarities in repetitive data that presented emerging themes signaled the point of saturation.

## Population and Sampling

The target population for the study was 30 Central Massachusetts business managers. The sample for this single-case study consisted of three Central Massachusetts business managers of different genders, races, backgrounds, and experiences who have successfully used strategies to improve employee performance. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this case study in justifying a sample. Qualitative researchers use purposive sampling to select participants who align with the research topic and can provide accurate and valid data for gaining insight into the phenomenon (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015; Elo et al., 2014; Haegele & Hodge, 2015). Yin (2014) noted that a case study with a sample of three to eight participants is sufficient for collecting the in-depth data needed to understand the context of the phenomenon; therefore, a sample size of three was adequate for this study.

I gathered relevant information through in-depth, face-to-face participant interviews until the themes became repetitive, thus indicating data saturation. Data saturation emerges in the repetitiveness of codes, themes, and patterns in the data (Alsaawi, 2014). Achieving data saturation was fundamental to the study's validity and involved conducting interviews and follow-up interviews until no new information emerged from the data (Galvin, 2015). 11-20-19-0310012

## Ethical Research

This study took place after receiving approval (approval no 11-20-19-0310012), from Walden University's IRB. Ethical guidelines as dictated by The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) were the principles of respect of persons, beneficence, and justice. The participants received letters of invitation via e-mail (see Appendix A) that included the study's purpose, including the intent to collect company documentation and record observations. The invitation to participate indicated that participation in the study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants did not receive compensation or incentives for their involvement and would receive a copy of the study's results via e-mail upon conclusion.

I contacted participants via telephone to schedule dates and times for interviews, during which I maintained the highest ethical research standards. Ethical research procedures were necessary to maintain the participants' privacy during data collection, as discussed by Gaeeni, Farahani, Seyedfatemi, and Mohammadi (2014). Sequential identification codes represented participants instead of names, with their companies referred to only as "the Company." Interviews took place at locations and times convenient to the participants (see Ohura, Takada, & Nakayama, 2014), with each audio-recorded with participants' approval. Only the researcher and the interviewee were present during the interviews to ensure the privacy of responses. According to Karabacak, Yildirim, and Baykal (2016), it is important for researchers to assure participants that their names, companies, and locations would remain unidentified and anonymous in the study. All written data secured in a locked file cabinet drawer and will undergo shredding after 5 years to protect participants' privacy; similarly, electronic data stored on a secure personal, password-protected portable external drive in a locked file cabinet drawer will undergo erasure.

## Data Collection Instruments

Data collection for a qualitative single-case study is the first stage in the research process (Rimando et al., 2015). Yin (2015) stated that qualitative researchers conducting case studies must collect data from at least two sources; in this study, the two sources were participant interviews and company documents. Interview questions should allow participants to provide information sufficient to answer the study's research question (Cooper et al., 2014; Morrison, Clement, Nestel, & Brown, 2016; Park & Park, 2016).

**Interviews**

Interviews with business managers occurred to the point of data saturation, with company documents subsequently reviewed to validate data from the interviews. Researchers gather information with interviews (Hedlund, Börjesson, & Österberg, 2015). Interviewing is a qualitative data collection strategies in which interviewers ask participants a series of predetermined, open-ended questions (Shi, 2014). Qualitative researchers rely on interviews to obtain the information needed to answer research questions. According to Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015), semistructured, face-to-face interviews are more effective when researchers use open-ended questions. Scholars who pose open-ended interview questions ensure credibility, facilitate data analysis, and reduce researcher bias (Patton, 2015). During each interview, participants answered questions (see Appendix C) about their experiences and perceptions of the strategies that business managers use to improve employee performance, as well as their perceptions of managers' best employee improvement practices. Each semistructured interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviewees could verify their responses by e-mail.

Ozertugrul (2015) suggested that researchers can enhance trustworthiness by providing interview transcripts to participants so they can validate their responses. I transcribed, classified, and organized participants' responses with NVivo Version 11 software, establishing the study's reliability and validity by acquiring and analyzing participants' feedback. In qualitative research, validity incorporates the integrity, adequacy, and reliability of the researcher and the diverse stakeholders (Zohrabi, 2013). According to Yin (2014), a case study interview protocol consists of an overview of the case study, data collection procedures, data collection questions, and a guide for the case study report (Yin, 2014). Accordingly, the interview protocol (see Appendix B) provided the data collection script and the interview questions. Researchers use interview protocols to enrich the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Participants had flexibility in responding to the interview questions, with each interview preserved via digital voice recording to enable the identification of major themes. Participants gave permission for audio recording during the consent process. Reimer and McLean (2015) defined notetaking as observing the research environment and documenting words, quotations, or other information relevant to the research. As the primary data collection instrument, I used supplementary tools, such as a notepad, to note scenarios that may have required follow-up questions.

**Company Documents**

Document review was the study's secondary data source. Interviews and documents on employee turnover provided insight into the successful strategies business managers use to improve employee performance and data authentication. Yin (2015) recommended reviewing documents as a case study data collection method. Company documents underwent review, including information on employee performance reviews, reward and recognition systems, and training systems. The companies used performance reviews to assess employees' work, performance, motivation, and feedback. Employee performance reviews are the most important, task-relevant feedback managers provide to employees. Also reviewed were reward and recognition documents managers use to encourage improved employee performance. The training tracking system was another valuable document showing overall employee status by qualification and indicated the gaps necessary to fill for a productive team. These documents were available through the company's intranet site.

Researchers can use member checking in qualitative studies to enhance the trustworthiness of their findings (Stake, 2010). Qualitative researchers use member checking to improve the reliability and validity of the data collected during interviews (Flicker et al., 2015). Member checking provided participants an opportunity to analyze and validate their responses. Follow-up member checking interviews with participants took place to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was an accurate representation of participants' interview responses.

Researchers use secondary data to access information not typically included in the research design (Yin, 2014). Madhlangobe et al. (2014) recommended that researchers use other sources of data in single-case studies to corroborate evidence. Scholars can use archival records in conjunction with the primary data source to support the study (Yin, 2014).

## Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers can use observations, interviews, archival business documents, or focus groups to collect data (Kornbluh, 2015). Face-to-face interviews and company documents were this study's primary data sources. Although scholars can use any of the four interview approaches to collect data, a face-to-face conversation is preferred for qualitative data collections because researchers can better control the information participants provide (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). After receiving IRB approval, I interviewed participants with the interview questions (see Appendix C). I listened for clarity, mitigated personal bias, took notes, and used a cellphone as the preapproved recording device.

Interviews are effective case study data collection techniques (Yin, 2015). Accordingly, semistructured, face-to-face interviews were the primary means of data collection. The interview questions aligned with the interview protocol in Appendix B. Scholars use interviews as data collection tools to discover participants' feelings and perceptions, observe nonverbal responses, and clarify incomplete answers (Bailey, 2014). According to Yin (2014), drawbacks of face-to-face interviews include the potential distance to the interview location and that participants may feel nervous during their interviews, which may cause skewed data. Other disadvantages include the risk of researcher bias, misaligned interview questions, and dishonest participant responses (Bailey, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Saxena, 2017).

Qualitative researchers often review documents to collect data for a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2015) recommended document review as a method of case study data collection. As such, I augmented the data collected in the interviews with company documents. Reviewing employee performance documents provided insights into the effectiveness of the employee improvement strategies managers discussed during their interviews. Researchers can achieve methodological triangulation by augmenting the interview data with company documents (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014)

Researchers must use two independent data collection sources—such as interviews and document reviews, as in this study—when conducting a qualitative case study; by using multiple data collection sources, scholars establish credibility and reach data saturation (Yin, 2015). Reviewing documents on employee improvement strategies provided valuable insight into the central research question. The benefits of reviewing documents included that it is an inexpensive collection process, provides access to detailed data from official documents, and does not require participants' willingness to provide information (Yin, 2015).

Researchers member check to confirm the accuracy of the information obtained from participants (Bailey, 2014; Simpson & Quigley, 2016; Yin, 2014). Through member checking, the participants verified the researcher's summations and analyses of their answers and the organizational employee engagement documents (Bailey, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Yin, 2014). Member checking is a quality control process used to ensure the accuracy of gathered information, eliminate researcher bias, and promote research credibility (Morse, 2015). Member checking occurred in the study when participants authenticated the accuracy of my summaries of their responses and experiences. Member checking is one means of increasing the reliability of a qualitative study (Saxena, 2017). Participants checked the provided summaries for any misinterpreted responses and to ensure an accurate representation of their viewpoints.

Methodological triangulation was another means to increase the study's validity. Researchers use methodological triangulation to address multiple threats to validity (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2015; Yin, 2014). Scholars must use methodological triangulation to confirm data reliability and validity and contribute to a broader understanding of the research topic (Turner et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). The advantages of methodological triangulation include achieving convergence, collaboration, and different insights into the phenomenon (Gibson, 2016). Case study researchers collect multiple sources of information to triangulate the data (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2016; Yin, 2014). In this study, strategies for methodological triangulation included gathering data from interviews, official and unofficial documentation, agency reports, and archival documents. The interview protocol used allowed for standardization of the interviews, thus ensuring the study's reliability.

## Data Organization Technique

Data organization is critical for analyzing and interpreting study data. Felice and Janesick (2015) found that spreadsheet programs are ideal for organizing and analyzing data. Hart (2016) and Godin, Stapleton, Kirkpatrick, Hanning, and Leatherdale (2015) used Excel software to organize and analyze case study data. I imported data from the semistructured interviews and relevant documents into an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate the data analysis process. Excel database software allowed me to create and maintain a master log of interview information and data collection process, which I subsequently exported to a password-protected, portable hard drive. I transferred audio files of the interviews to a password-protected computer for review and protection, deleting any recordings on the device. Scanned versions of handwritten notes provided an audit trail, stored along with field notes on a password-protected computer. Throughout data collection, organization, and analysis, participants' and companies' identities remained protected, with identifying information removed and alphanumeric pseudonyms assigned to ensure their privacy. Dipeolu, Storlie, Hargrave, and Cook (2015) recommended replacing participants' identifying information with alphanumeric identifiers to preserve confidentiality. I created a folder for each participant labeled with the participant's unique code (Participant P1, Participant P2, and Participant P3) and the date of the interview, next placing each participant's interpreted summary, interview notes, and signed consent form into the assigned folder.

Researchers must enforce privacy policy procedures to protect participants during the data organization process (Landwehr, 2016). It is necessary for collected data from a research study to remain secure (Tsai et al., 2016). Researchers must use great caution when storing documents to maintain the confidentiality of the participants (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015). Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) and Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) mentioned that qualitative researchers commonly use qualitative data analysis software to facilitate the storage, organization, and analysis of data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documents. Accordingly, I stored, organized, and coded data from the interviews, documentary information, and field notes in NVivo 11 qualitative research software. I will retain the raw data for 5 years after the study, per Walden University's guidelines, at which point I will destroy it.

## Data Analysis

Methodological triangulation shows the differences and similarities between results and indicates new perspectives (Durif-Bruckert et al., 2015). According to Yin (2014), researchers use methodological triangulation to improve the validity of a study through the use of more than one data collection method. Methodological triangulation occurred for data analysis after I reviewed the interview transcripts and archival documents to ensure the completeness of the data sources and the data's reliability and validity. Data analysis occurred by organizing the participants' responses and reviewing the company's archived employee performance documents. After data analysis, I used NVivo 11 to code, identify themes, and show the correlations between each classification.

**Yin's Five-Step Process**

Yin (2015) recommended performing the data analysis process in sequential order through five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Scholars must ensure data integrity through an accurate and appropriate analysis of the research. Researchers who conduct inadequate analyses incorrectly present scientific findings, mislead readers, and may negatively affect the study's results.

**Compiling**. Compiling data is the first stage of the process. In this stage, researchers compile notes, transcribe data, and collect other research data (Yin, 2015). In this step, I listened to the audio recordings, viewed video recordings, and transcribed the data into Microsoft Word to capture participants' responses to the interview questions. Public databases provided additional information. Reviewed documents served as another source of data classified into groups.

**Disassembling**. The second stage is disassembling the data into manageable fragments (Edwards-Jones, 2014; Yin, 2015). Accordingly, I divided the study data into groups with keywords that indicated themes from participants' responses. I identified keywords both before and during data analysis.

**Reassembling**. The third stage is reassembling the data by creating codes and clusters (Yin, 2015). Researchers interpret the data after they organize the information and find relevant themes (Yin, 2015). During the data reassembling step, I regrouped data, categorizing it by theme.

**Interpreting the data**. The fourth stage is data interpretation (Yin, 2015). During this phase, a narrative of responses to explain the data for the participants to apprehend. The narrative data came from open-ended questions, interviews, and document reviews. Narrative data is a form of reporting in which the researcher prepares for the study's conclusion based on the data (Harvey, 2015).

**Concluding the data**. Concluding the data is the final step in data analysis (Yin, 2015). In this step, researchers draw conclusions based on the interpretations made in stage four (Yin, 2015). I compiled all data, organized material into more manageable compilations, arranged material into groups, and identified themes to complete the data analysis process. The interviews and the employee performance documents underwent analysis, with conclusions made from the data source interpretations.

## Methodological Triangulation

Methodological triangulation is a data analysis tool that requires two or more sources for data validation (Yin, 2015). Researchers triangulate data to test the validity of information collected from different sources (Carter et al., 2014; Pooe, Mafini, & Makhubele, 2015). Morse (2015) and Wilson (2014) recommended that case study researchers use triangulation during the data analysis process. Scholars use methodological triangulation to ensure the credibility of data during data analysis (van

Dijk, Vervoort, van Wijck, Kalkman, & Schuurmans, 2016), reduce data misinterpretation, and improve quality and reliability (Cho & Lee, 2014; Joslin & Müller, 2016). Methodological triangulation entailed the use of multiple data sources, including semistructured interview responses and archived company records, to validate the data during the data analysis process.

According to Yazan (2015) and Yin (2014), the conceptual framework for a qualitative study connects with the methodology and the literature. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory provided the study's conceptual framework, with data analyzed using expectancy theory in the final synopsis. The analyzed data presented the different strategies that business managers used to improve employee performance. Key themes found underwent comparison with the literature, including studies published after the initial literature review.

**Qualitative Software Analysis Method**

Scholars code data to correlate data within the interview questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Participants received assigned pseudonyms for each question and for each response. For example, P1 is for manager one to P3; IQ1 is for interview question one to IQ3; and RQ1 was used for the response to the research question. In addition, pertinent documents received a letter and a number in place of a title—for example, Document 1 became D1. NVivo 11 software allows qualitative researchers to code and identify themes by (a) importing and analyzing text-based data, (b) organizing information using themes and coding, (c) reviewing coding and highlighting, (d) measuring word frequency, and (e) exporting data analysis and findings (Zamawe, 2015). One of the many benefits of NVivo is the software's word frequency feature, which shows how often participants used certain words during their interviews. Next, I exported data from NVivo 11 into Microsoft Excel, where I compiled a list of codes and themes, their frequency, and in-text codes. Upon identifying the categories, I reviewed the number of times specific themes appeared and showed their correlations between the categories. One of the simplest ways to identify a theme is through repetition.

Next, I exported data from Microsoft Word into Microsoft Excel and created a table for easy viewing. Researchers enhance the data analysis process by improving data interpretations when they use multiple sources to gain insight into the research problem. I used NVivo along with Yin's (2015) five-step process (compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding) to manage the collected data during data analysis.

Key themes in the academic and professional literature, including recently published studies, underwent comparison. The objective was to compare significant themes in the literature to show how the themes supported, refuted, or clarified the peer-reviewed literature (Pryce, 2016). Researchers must stay current on their research topics during the research process (Yin, 2015). Accordingly, I signed up for search alerts to stay up to date on emerging publications, something Pocock (2016) noted that researchers can do by receiving automatic e-mail or RSS feed alerts when new articles that matched search criteria became available. I also signed up for Walden Library search alerts to receive continuous updates of publications on the studied research topic and conceptual framework after completion of the study.

## Reliability and Validity

Various approaches used in this study helped to ensure reliability and validity. Means of establishing reliability and validity included methodological triangulation, member checking, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and data saturation. The goal was to attain an analytical overview of the theoretical results while ensuring a reliable and valid study (see Alexander, 2014).

### Reliability

Qualitative researchers ensure trustworthiness by reporting the data collection method and sampling approach (Elo et al., 2014). Methodological triangulation further shows the study's reliability. Gibson (2016) and Yin (2014) indicated that researchers use methodological triangulation to enhance the reliability of the study because the analyzed data comes from multiple sources, as opposed to studying the phenomenon through a single data source. Keeping an audit trail of the data collection process also ensured the study's dependability. Dipeolu et al. (2015) noted that maintaining an audit trail makes the data collection process transparent, providing dependability if other researchers decide to analyze the data.

### Validity

Scholars use triangulation and member checking to establish research validity (Zohrabi, 2013). The methodological triangulation of different sources helped to enhance data validity and reliability. Börjesson (2014) suggested using member checking to provide validity in qualitative research. Member checking gave participants the opportunity to confirm and validate their interview results and interpretations. Harvey

(2015) defined member checking as a back-and-forth dialogue between the participants and the researcher, with additional clarification achieved through questions. Allowing the participants to review study results provides more credibility (Birt et al., 2016).

**Credibility**

A study has credibility when the data analysis results accurately present the experiences that participants conveyed during their interviews (Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutchings, 2015). Scholars can use detailed descriptions of the collected data to determine trustworthiness, relevance, and credibility levels (Grossoehme, 2014). In methodological triangulation, scholars combine two or more data collection methods to create a more valid and credible view of the data (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). To increase the study's credibility, I used methodological triangulation through the collection and analysis of data from the interview responses and company documents.

**Transferability**

Transferability enables readers to decide whether similarities are present within the study's contents (Duggleby & Williams, 2016). Rapport et al. (2015) discussed transferability as the extent to which scholars can transfer or generalize the qualitative results to other contexts or circumstances. Rapport et al. (2015) discussed transferability as the extent to which scholars can transfer or generalize the qualitative data to other contexts or circumstances. Although transferability is not the primary goal of a case study, scholars can ensure transferability with in-depth descriptions and diverse populations (Morse, 2015). To address transferability in this study, I recruited participants who met the inclusion criteria of hiring manager to address the research question.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the intersection of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Moon & Blackman, 2014). In confirmability, the results must present the participants' voices and provide information on all data-generated themes. I set aside any preconceptions or biases and focused on participants' insights to attain confirmability. The field notes I took during each interview captured my remarks and observations of participants' emotions and insights. Li and Zhang (2015) mentioned the usefulness of field notes that contain the data gathered from the study's analysis.

Data saturation occurs when the researcher obtains sufficient information to answer the research questions and no new themes emerge from additional data collection or sampling (Cope, 2015). Saldana (2016) further identified data saturation as the point when no new information, properties, conditions, dimensions, consequences, or actions emerge during the coding process. Data saturation strengthens confirmability in a case study (Yazan, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with follow-up questions as needed. When respondents begin to give the same answers, saturation has occurred and the interviews should end (Bedwell, McGowan, & Lavender, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I continued to conduct interviews until no new themes emerged. I achieved saturation with the initial five participants; thus, no further sampling was needed.

## Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the study’s purpose statement and the researcher’s role, along with justification for the study’s research method and design. The section also included descriptions of the participants, population and sampling, data collection, and data organization. Section 2 concluded with a discussion of reliability and validity and how the study met the quality standards of a doctoral study. In Section 3, I present the study’s findings, the participants’ responses, the application of the study to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research and reflections.

# Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In the final section of this research study, I present the findings from the data collection process, member checking, and company documents that included employee records, reviews, archival data, and website data. Section 3 begins with an introduction of the purpose statement, problem statement, and the research question. This section includes the qualitative case study's research, an analysis of the overall results, emergent themes, application of those themes to professional practice, and the implications for social change. The section concludes with recommendations for action and further research, researcher reflections, and a summary of the overall study.

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how business managers improve employee performance. Data from participating business managers' interviews and company documents underwent analysis, indicating three themes: (a) set clear expectations and performance reviews, (b) recognition and rewards, and (c) management style. Section 3 includes the participants' responses, the potential implications for social change, recommendations, reflections, and a conclusion.

## Presentation of the Findings

Employees are an organization's most valuable assets (Zhang et al., 2014), and executives must develop strategies to improve employee performance and efficiency and ensure business sustainability (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014). Business managers can achieve high employee performance and productivity with successful employee improvement strategies (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). Employers of any organization could use this study's results to improve employee performance and contribute to social change. The three participants were Central Massachusetts business managers who had created and implemented successful employee improvement strategies; however, managers of any organization could use the strategies identified in this study to improve employee performance.

### Theme 1: Set Clear Expectations and Performance Reviews

All participants said they immediately set expectations when new members join the team. Clear expectations and performance reviews as employee improvement strategies emerged from the interview questions as the first theme. Set expectations included arriving to work on time, respecting and trusting each other, and working as a team to meet expectations from the start. Participants also scheduled biannual one-on-one meetings with operators, group leaders, and supervisors. P1 said, "We work as a team, so we go through the expectations on Day 1, and then we meet one-on-one twice a year with the operators and every quarter with the group leaders and supervisors."

Business managers use performance reviews to implement organizational goals and improve employee performance (Ayers, 2015). P2 explained expectations to employees, discussed how successfully they met those expectations, and provided feedback for improvement. The participants used the six basic company values, including respect, trust, passion for the job, and feedback. P3 asserted that the number-one employee improvement strategy was making sure employees knew their manager was there to help them succeed in meeting their goals.

P1 stated that setting goals for employees was one of the best employee improvement strategies for any organization. Business managers use performance reviews to implement organizational goals and improve employee performance (Ayers, 2015). According to Balcioglu and Nihinlola (2014), managers use employee evaluation as an employee improvement strategy. This study's participating managers valued their relationships with their employees. They stated that gaining employees' respect and trust resulted in strong employee performance, as employees strove to achieve their assigned goals. All participants provided 30-day, 60-day, and 90-day employee performance action plans to integrate new hires into the company. P2 uses performance action plans to help employees succeed while holding them accountable for bad performance. P3 said that performance review plans should include specific, accurate, and measurable objectives.

**Theme 2: Reward and Recognition**

Rewarding employees is a significant employee improvement strategy. Employers establish employee reward systems to motivate, manage, and monitor employee performance (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Methods of employee recognition with rewards include employee-of-the-month awards, thank-you e-mails, verbal thanks or handshakes, goodies, and desired training classes. P1 asks employees what type of reward they wanted; depending on the accomplishment and circumstance, P1 provides employees with their desired rewards. Managers establish recognition programs to acknowledge employees who show commitment to both departmental and organizational objectives, designing the document to establish a formal process for recognizing outstanding performance. Employee recognition and reward programs, other than pay and incentives, combined with quality leadership indicate improved employee performance (Chandani, Mehta, Mall, & Khokhar, 2016). During the interview, P3 stated, “I take it very personally, as far as letting my staff know if they are doing a good job. If someone is doing a good job, I make sure that the rest of the team knows.”

**Theme 3: Management Style**

Management style is the way managers accomplish objectives. Management style is important to retention, though some managers elect negative behaviors such as fear and intimidation (Anyaebosi, 2015). Successful managers plan, prioritize, and organize work efforts to accomplish objectives. Today’s business environment requires a management style beneficial to the organization and employees. Managers with successful leadership styles benefit their organizations, increase employee commitment, and improve working relationships between employees and managers. During the interview, I noticed three major management styles participants used: (a) democratic, and (b) laissez-faire, and (c) situational.

P1 uses a democratic approach and involves key employees in the decision-making process to make them feel they are working as a team. This style leads to the development of trust and loyalty among the subordinates (Srivastava, 2016). The manager takes his or her workers into full consideration, utilizes their skills and knowledge, and considers their input before arriving at a decision. In democratic management style, a relationship exists between the manager and the workers (Srivastava, 2016). The strength of this style is that democratic is a participative management style in which the team or the group contribute to the process of making decisions. Also, Cherry (2016) stated that democratic leadership works best in situations where group members are skilled and eager to share their knowledge. Democratic managers also allow individuals enough time to contribute, develop a plan, and then vote on the best course of action.

P2 used Laissez-faire. Laissez-faire leaders provide no support and no direction to their employees. According to Cherry (2016), laissez-faire style also referred to as delegation leadership, is a kind of management style wherein managers are hands-off and permit a team member within the group to make the choices. Researchers have found that this is the management style that leads to the lowest productivity among group members. Zareen et al. (2015) further stated that laissez-faire leadership style is useful in situations with large numbers of decisions, when decision making is easy, when followers should perform routine tasks with fewer complexities and less demanding criteria, or when rules and regulations are pre-determined. This leadership style is inappropriate when followers lack knowledge, experience, and expertise or when they are unwilling or unable to make decisions on their own (Zareen et al., 2015).

P3 said that there is no single solution to lead employees/teams. The situational leadership theory concentrates on the utilization of a leader's personal aptitudes and natural capacity to lead in a present circumstance (McCleskey, 2014). The situational leadership theory provides a practical approach and assists managers in understanding and applying a leadership style(s). In situational style, managers focused on how employees would respond to a scenario given. P3 said that he uses the best of employees’ abilities and identified employee strengths and do not assign employees, tasks that set them up to fail. Duffy et al. (2014) found that employees with extra work choices felt more satisfied than those who did not have work choices. The situational leadership theory is a useful tool that could help leaders in all types of organizations to achieve their targets.

**Correlation to conceptual framework.** Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory served as the study's conceptual framework as a potential means for understanding successful employee improvement strategies managers use. The findings of this study mirror Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory as it pertains to the positive managerial affects and employee performance. Managers can use Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation to increase employee performance.

According to Bayram and Dinc (2015), existing empirical research suggests that employee job satisfaction influences a business's chances of survival. Shah and Beh (2016) suggested that employees are cognitively and emotionally engaged when they understand the expectations, goals, and missions of the organization and have resources and opportunities to be efficient and feel fulfilled in their work. Employees are committed to performing at their highest capacity when managers provide detailed employee expectations. As employees meet the expectations of the managers, their level of motivation and performance increases, which leads to improved productivity. Managers can apply the expectancy theory to motivate staff to achieve organization goals.

According to Vroom's expectancy theory, employees are motivated toward a behavior based on three factors: (a) expectancy, (b) instrumentality, and (c) valence. Participants claimed that the provision of rewards and recognitions were motivational strategies to increase employee engagement. As noted by Reader et al. (2017), employee performance increases when employees are provided with incentive, recognition, and rewards, such as salary increases, company bonuses, and employee discounts in return for time expended to support the organization. Cooklin, Joss, Husser, and Oldenburg (2017) suggested that the mental and physical health of workers in business determine the level of employee engagement and employee performance.

As noted from the participant responses, rewards and incentives were used as motivational strategies to increase employee engagement. Managers can identify the different ideas to incentivize employees to increase employee performance. Engaged employees are more productive and energetic when presented with a motivator. Managers can develop a rapport with employees that enables them to understand the needs of each employee in the organization. Managers can use Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation to increase employee engagement by identifying the intrinsic or extrinsic motivational influence of the employee to increase employee engagement.

**Findings related to existing literature.** Findings in this study were consistent with the literature on how employee performance improvement can increase organization profit. All participants elaborated on offering rewards, performance bonuses on the spot, quarterly, or annually. Antony (2018) noted that organizations must motivate leaders to engage their employees through performance criteria and rewarding engagement through incentive programs. Managers must work on developing an environment of continuous improvement through training. Antony (2018) posited that organizational policies and strategies are favorable to employee growth and development, enhancing employee engagement. Engaged employees may be more open to seeking job training by asking for feedback and asking for opportunities for development by working on new work projects when there is an engaged work environment (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Participants noted the importance of a performance management strategy to improve employee engagement. This finding confirms the research of Caniëls et al. (2018), who noted that leaders can use performance management strategy to improve employee engagement.

The findings aligned with the literature on the direct effect of reward and recognition as motivators to increase employee engagement. As noted by Reader et al. (2017), employee performance increases when employees are provided with incentive, recognition, and rewards in return for time expended to support the organization. When employees believe their organizational leader recognizes their achievement of challenging tasks via an organizational recognition strategy, higher levels of employee engagement exist (Mohammed & Alem, 2018). As noted from the participant responses, rewards and incentives were used as motivational strategies to increase employee engagement. Managers can identify different ways to incentivize employees to increase employee performance.

Reed et al. (2016) suggested that managers who actively listen to employees and provide constructive criticism and feedback increase employee confidence and productivity. Howell and Howell (2017) suggested that managers must assess the strengths and weaknesses of employees to help them cultivate their skills and talents. Managers should work closely with employees to improve organizational effectiveness and to increase organization profitability.

## Applications to Professional Practice

Identifying the strategies that business managers use to improve employee performance is crucial for organizational success and sustainability. Balcioglu and Nihinlola (2014) posited that lack of organizational employee improvement causes poor employee performance, reduced efficiency, and potential business failure. Scholars and practitioners have demonstrated that business managers use various strategies to improve employee performance (Campbell, 2014; Chan & Dar, 2014; Hooi & Ngui, 2014; Nguyen, Dang, & Nguyen, 2015; Rehman & Ali, 2013; Ukaegbu, 2014; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). Business managers can use the findings of this study to improve overall employee performance and increase organizational productivity.

## Implications for Social Change

Implications for social change stem from tangible improvements to individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, or societies. This study may fill the knowledge gap of the strategies business managers should implement to engage and improve employee performance. Managers can use strategies from this study’s findings to improve employee performance and learn about the best business practices required to sustain performance improvement; in turn, sustained performance improvement may result in improved organizational performance and longevity, having positive effects on employees’ families and communities.

## Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to show how some business managers improve employee performance and increase productivity. Organizational leaders should have the required competencies for improving employee performance. Based on the study's findings, recommendations emerged for current and future business managers to consider when using employee improvement strategies to increase productivity.

Business managers should provide leadership support to their employees. Managers may consider developing relationships with employees and involving them in the decision-making process so workers feel valued and want to contribute to organizational success. Supportive leaders engage employees (Men & Stacks, 2014). Managers should communicate clearly and provide feedback with well-defined expectations, coaching, and training to create successful working environments and improve employee performance. Managers who communicate well boost morale; enhance processes, engagement, and productivity; and reduce employee turnover (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015). Finally, managers should offer robust compensation and rewards and establish recognition programs to promote engagement and productivity.

The findings of this study will be available for business managers interested in improving employee performance. Means of dissemination include publishing and sharing the study's results with managers who may benefit from the findings. Distribution of the findings will also be to specific groups, such as HR departments.

## Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative single-case study was a means to show how business managers improve employee performance. The study's participants were three Central Massachusetts business managers. The focus of this study was the strategies that business managers used to improve employee performance. The study's primary limitation was the inability to generalize the results. The second limitation was that the sample might not have been representative of the population. Lastly, as I was the study's only data collector and interpreter, there was the potential for individual bias. Delimitations are the boundaries of a study within the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation was that only business managers within Central Massachusetts participated in this study. The second delimitation was that the study only included business managers who used successful employee improvement strategies.

## Reflections

Attaining a doctoral degree is intense in every aspect. The process is time-consuming and involves a substantial financial investment, and waiting for feedback makes the process even longer. However, all the sacrifices were worth getting the degree, and I thank God I achieved a long-term dream. I am grateful to my chair and the committee members who contributed to my success. While conducting the research, I gained experience, significantly increased my knowledge, and validated my profession as an operational leader who deals with employees. Additionally, I learned scholarly writing skills and met with the managers who successfully managed their employees.

My perspective on employee performance improvement includes management support by providing the necessary tools to employees. Improved employee performance often emerges from robust training programs that include coaching, mentoring, involving employees in decision-making, and opportunities for work-life balance. The findings from this study aligned with my thoughts about employee performance improvement. However, I ensured that my concerns about employee performance improvement did not indicate bias by incorporating member checking. The study's findings showed the strategies that business managers could use to improve employee performance.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to show how business managers improve employee performance. Data collection came from participants' responses to the interview questions and a review of pertinent documentation. Business managers' employee improvement and productivity strategies appear in this study's themes. Managers' responses to the interview questions, my observations of managers during their interactions with employees, and the analysis of organizational documents indicated three themes: (a) setting clear expectations and performance review, (b) recognition and reward, and (c) management style. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory was the study's conceptual framework. The findings indicated that business managers who implement successful employee improvement strategies may see improved employee engagement and increased productivity. Thus, engaged employees feel connected with the company's values and organizational goals.

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# Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my Walden University doctoral study. The purpose of this qualitative single-case study is to show the strategies that semiconductor business managers use to improve employee performance. Participation in the research study is voluntary and confidential. Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions before deciding to participate.

To achieve the research study's objectives, you must meet certain criteria: (a) manage at least five employees, (b) have experience with employee engagement, and (c) be 18 years of age or older. If you meet these criteria and want to participate in this study, please call me at (xxx) xxx-xxx or e-mail me to schedule a convenient interview time. Each interview should last no longer than 1 hour. The interviews will be audio recorded, and participants will have the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. I sincerely appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Moustaph Fall

# Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I will introduce myself to the interviewees and conduct interviews at locations convenient to participants. Each face-to-face interview will begin with an introduction and an overview of the research topic. I will advise each participant that I am sensitive to their time and thank them for agreeing to participate in the study. I will remind each participant that the interview will be audio recorded and our conversation will remain confidential. I will turn on the audio recorder and inform participants of their identifying assigned code, as well as the date and time of the interview.

The interview will last about 45 to 60 minutes, depending on responses to the interview questions and follow-up questions. During the interview, I will watch for nonverbal cues, paraphrase as needed, and ask follow-up questions for clarity. After each participant confirms satisfaction with the recorded responses, the interview will conclude, and I will wrap up with a thank you for participating in the study.

I will then explain member checking, schedule a follow-up member checking interview to ensure each question is thoroughly explained, and confirm that each participant's answers were transcribed as intended by the participant. Participants will receive their interview transcripts within a week via e-mail to verify the accuracy of the collected information.

After I have transcribed and recorded the findings and concluded the study, I will share a short synthesis of the individual questions. I will bring probing questions related to the information I have found, noting that the information must adhere to IRB approval.

I will walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask if I missed anything or if the interviewee wants to add anything. At the study's conclusion, I will provide each participant with a synopsis of the study.

# Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Which strategies do you find most effective for increasing employee performance?
2. How do you define employee performance?
3. How do you measure employee performance?
4. Which methods do you use to improve performance?
5. How do your employees respond to your management strategies?
6. What other information would you like to add regarding strategies that you found helpful for improving employee performance?
7. What barriers do you think hinder workplace performance in your organization?

Appendix D: National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research Certificate

# CERTIFICATE

## OF COMPLETION

PHRP Online Training, LLC certifies that

**Moustaph Fall**

has successfully completed the web-based course
"Protecting Human Research Participants Online Training".

Date Completed: **05/01/2019**
Certification Number: **2824627**

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